

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Paul's Concluding Thoughts Galatians 6:11-18

Paul takes the pen in his own hand (Gal 6:11)

- As Paul concludes his letter to the Galatian churches, he writes the final words in his own distinctive handwriting as if to certify the authenticity of the entire letter with his personal stamp of approval.
- It could be that Paul had hand-written the entire letter himself, but that was not his usual practice. Typically a trained secretary would have neatly printed the letter for public reading in the churches. Here it seems more likely that Paul has taken the pen to write his concluding thoughts. "*With what large letters*" calls attention to the fact that Paul's handwriting is distinct from that of the secretary. It was as if he were saying, "Pay careful attention to my final words!"
- These final verses emphasize the key points Paul had been making throughout the letter - that false teachers were trying to persuade the Galatians to submit to the system of the Law which is opposed to the new economy of the cross of Christ. These concluding comments contain many reminders which point back into the body of the letter to highlight points that Paul had already made there.

One last strike against the false teachers (Gal 6:12-13)

- Since Paul's main goal was to counteract the message of the false teachers, he does not want to close this letter without summarizing their errors and their motives.
- The false teachers were putting on a "good face" (literally). They only made an outward show of conformity to the practices of the Jewish system.
- "*In the flesh*" = in the *realm* of the fleshly nature. Paul had clearly contrasted the flesh with the Spirit - the works of the law with the fruit of the Spirit. Here he clearly shows that the false teachers wanted nothing more than a good showing of human effort. And their desire to put on a good facade for others was certainly prompted by the fleshly, fallen human nature.
- They simply wanted to gain the acceptance and approval of their countrymen. Paul points out that their motive was to avoid persecution. Had they preached the true gospel, they would have faced the same kind of persecution that Paul faced. The reason Paul was persecuted was because he taught that the work of Christ (*the cross of Christ*) is the only basis for being justified before God (see Gal. 5:11).
- Paul reminds the Galatians that even the Jews themselves cannot actually keep the Law (see Gal. 3:10-11). The underlying motive of the false teachers is ambition - they want to be able to boast about the numbers of followers they had recruited.

One last reminder of what Christ's work on the cross accomplished for us (Gal 6:14-16)

- "*But*"... by contrast, Paul would never do this. He did not desire to glory in his own fleshly accomplishments nor in the works of others. The only thing worth boasting about is what Christ accomplished on our behalf (see Gal. 3:13).

- Our fleshly accomplishments count for nothing toward our justification before God. That is why Paul reminds believers that we have been crucified with Christ (see Gal. 2:20) and we are no longer in slavery to the desires of the flesh. We are no longer bound to try to impress the world like the false teachers were doing.
- "*Circumcision nor uncircumcision*" = here Paul reminds us that being a Jew or being a Gentile does not provide any advantage when standing before God (see Gal. 5:6). The only thing that counts is being a "*NEW CREATION*". The creation of something entirely new is something that only God can accomplish, and that is the only thing that matters in our justification before God.
- "*This rule*" = the previous verse (Gal. 6:15) contains a "rule" that Paul wants every believer to live by. This rule is that Jewish/Gentile distinctions mean nothing when it comes to salvation - the only thing that counts is being a *new creature*. Walking according to this rule means giving up any hope that human effort will be effective in attaining righteousness before God - that salvation comes by faith alone in Christ alone.
- Those who walk by this rule will have peace with God as well as being the objects of His mercy - it is God who justifies believers on the basis of the finished work of Christ.
- "*The Israel of God*" = believing Jews; Israelites who are walking by this rule. God has always worked with the believing remnant of the nation of Israel (see Romans 9 - 11).

One last testimony to Paul's apostleship (Gal 6:17)

- "*Cause trouble for me*" = (literally) *give me troubles*; cause Paul to defend his apostolic authority as well as the truth of his gospel message. Paul had gone to a great deal of trouble to accomplish this in the letter to the Galatians. He had answered the "troublemakers" in such a way that "*from now on*" he should not need to do so again.
- "*The brand-marks of Jesus*" = these were the kinds of "brands" that were given to slaves in order to identify their owner. Brands were also marked on soldiers, captives, and servants in the pagan temples. Paul certainly bore in his body the brand marks of suffering for Jesus (see Second Corinthians 11:23-28).
- Paul's own battered physical body testified to the authenticity of his apostleship!

One final blessing on Paul's brethren (Gal 6:18)

- Grace is the undeserved favor of God that give us new life, and it also provides us with a new desire and power to live in a way that pleases God. Everything that Paul has said about the work of Christ on our behalf is the result of the grace of God.
- Paul addresses them as "brethren" at several places in this letter (see Gal. 4:12; 5:11; 6:1). But he has spoken very sternly, and before he closes he wants to make sure they understand that he holds great affection for them as his brethren in Christ.

We must avoid the temptation to put on a good show to get the approval of others or to gather a band of followers. If we boast in anything we should boast only in what Christ has done for us on the cross. We should live every day in light of our new life in Christ, realizing that persecution might be the consequence of such a life lived for Christ.

Was the letter to the Galatians effective?

- After the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:3-31) and after a period of ministry in the church at Antioch in Syria (Acts 15:32-35), Paul said, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the Word of the Lord and see how they are" (Acts 15:36). These "brethren" were in the churches of Galatia to whom Paul ministered during his first missionary journey.

- On this second missionary journey, Paul took the overland route through Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41) before arriving in the churches of Galatia (Acts 16:4-6). Everywhere they went they delivered the decree of the Jerusalem Council, that the Gentiles were *not* required to submit to circumcision nor to the Jewish Law. The Galatian churches were still there, and they were growing in the faith as well as growing in numbers.
- Paul moved on to visit Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus during his second missionary journey. He then returned to his home church of Antioch in Syria (Acts 18:22).
- After spending some time ministering in Antioch, Paul began his third missionary journey by again visiting the churches of Galatia (Acts 18:23) on his way to Ephesus. It was probably while Paul was in Ephesus that he wrote to the church at Corinth, and in his first letter to Corinth Paul used the churches in Galatia as a model for giving to the needs of the saints (First Corinthians 16:1).
- These historical records in the New Testament demonstrate that Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia was indeed effective! These churches remained true to God's Word for many years to come. They provided missionary co-workers for Paul, as well as financial support for the work of the Lord.

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